

Committee on House Administration
Subcommittee on Elections
The Importance of Pollworkers: Best Practices and Recommendations
Wednesday, October 3, 2007
Chairwoman Zoe Lofgren
Opening Statement

Good afternoon and welcome to the Subcommittee on Elections hearing on The Importance of Poll Workers: Best Practices and Recommendations.

The Help America Vote Act placed the responsibility of training poll workers in the hands of the states. The enactment of HAVA brought the state into the arena of poll worker training. HAVA requires that each state prepare a HAVA state plan detailing what it will do to implement the new federal mandates, including a description of how each state will use HAVA Title II funds to educate elections officials and poll workers.

State law on poll worker training and procedures differ greatly from state to state. However, there are several ongoing problems. Some states require little to no training, while other states are taking the initiative and using creative means, such as online training, or providing specialized task and multilingual training. Poll workers pay is also dismally low. It is difficult to recruit poll workers when the average daily basic pay for a poll worker is \$57.00. For a day that starts before 7 a.m. and ends after 10 p.m. in addition to mandatory training we must address increased compensation. As a result of these factors, poll worker morale is quite low. After the 2000 election and subsequent election controversies, absenteeism among poll workers has increased. This has led to staffing shortages, polls opening late, and the disenfranchisement of voters.

According to a study funded by the Pew Center on the States, two million Americans serve as poll workers, most with only a few hours of specialized instruction. This results in voters and poll workers finding polling places understaffed because of no-shows or personnel shortages. Personnel shortage is not the only issue. Poll workers come to work each year finding that the voting equipment continues to change. Some jurisdictions have multiple voting machines and they range from electronic machines to optical scanners to paperless electronic systems and in other states, lever systems.

Recruiting poll workers is an ongoing challenge for the states. NACo reports that 56 percent of election officials reported they were unable to fully staff the polls in the last presidential election. The skills needed to serve as a poll worker have changed, while the skills of our poll workers have not. Since 2000 and the passage of HAVA we are asking our poll workers to do more and we are not doing enough to prepare them for one of the most important tasks, administering voting.

Not only does HAVA require the states to take responsibility for poll workers, it requires the EAC to conduct studies on methods of recruiting, training, and improving the performance of poll workers. The EAC just released the study "Successful Practices in

Poll Worker Recruiting, Training and Retention.” This study developed best practices based on 17 months of research and was implemented through a partnership with several organizations, including the Poll Worker Institute. This study is essentially a ‘snapshot’ of poll worker recruitment, training and service practices across the country.

Poll workers are the link between election administrators and the voters. Unfortunately, they are not being properly prepared or compensated for undertaking such an obligation. I am excited about today’s hearing and to listen to what our witnesses have to say. Understanding the problem and what state and local government are doing to address the important role poll workers play is essential to improving the American election system.

I thank the witnesses for coming today and would like to note that the Secretary of State of Ohio, Jennifer Brunner, was unable to make today’s hearing, but she has submitted her testimony for the record.